



# Montgomery County Council

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From the Office of Councilmember Valerie Ervin January 31, 2013

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## **Coalition of Elected Leaders and Non-profit Providers to Shop for Groceries on Monday, Feb. 4, to Kick-off SNAP the Silence Challenge**

*Shopping Trip Will Begin 5-Day Challenge, Where Hundreds  
Have Committed to Live on \$25 Food Budget*

ROCKVILLE, Md., January 31, 2013—A coalition of elected and non-profit leaders, led by Montgomery County Councilmember Valerie Ervin, will join together on at 9 a.m. on Monday, Feb. 4, to kick-off the first day of the SNAP the Silence Challenge as they shop for five days worth of food on a \$25 budget.

The group will shop for their food at the Giant Food located at 625 Hungerford Drive in Rockville. Following the shopping, they will assemble outside the store to say why participating in the challenge is so important to them. The challenge of eating on a total of \$25 for five days has been accepted by nearly 300 local residents, who have already signed up to participate from Monday, Feb. 4, through Friday evening, Feb. 8.

Expected to join Councilmember Ervin in the shopping trip Monday morning are County Councilmember Nancy Floreen; Montgomery Board of Education President Chris Barclay; Superintendent of Schools Joshua Starr; Jeffrey Slavin, board chair of the Non-Profit Village and Mayor of Somerset; Ronnie Galvin, executive director of Impact Silver Spring; Jenna Umbriac, the nutrition educator for Manna Food; Kathy Stevens of the Montgomery Coalition for Adult Literacy; and representatives from Maryland Hunger Solutions.

Each participant in the challenge is limited to a \$5 per day food budget, which is close to the average amount allotted to the nation's neediest residents through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program.

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Councilmember Ervin's "SNAP the Silence" Challenge not only seeks to raise awareness about poverty in Montgomery County, but aims to unite partners from all corners of the community—elected officials, non-profit and faith-based leaders, students and local organizers—in a collaboration that can produce a heightened understanding of the issues and solutions to combat them.

"We all know how expensive it is to live in Montgomery County," said Councilmember Ervin. "What many people may not know is how many working families struggle to put food on the table every day. The current economic crisis has forced more people than ever to ask for public assistance. This experience will give all of us a better understanding of what so many people in our nation—and many in our County—go through on a daily basis."

According to the County's Department of Health and Human Services, almost 27,000 Montgomery households were on SNAP assistance in fiscal year 2012, a 138 percent increase from Fiscal Year 2007.

SNAP Challenge participants will be asked to keep track of the food they consume each day, report on how they are feeling as they take the challenge and meet at the close of week to discuss their experiences at a community engagement event on the topic of poverty. The discussion concluding the challenge will be led by Impact Silver Spring and A Wider Circle starting at 6 p.m. Friday, Feb. 8, at the Civic Building in Silver Spring.

"We are grateful that Councilmember Ervin has taken leadership around the issue of food security and poverty in our community," said Ronnie Galvin. "Allowing poverty to exist in a county as loving and resourceful as Montgomery County is a betrayal of our most closely held values. The SNAP the Silence Campaign gives people a real way to get involved and to act."

SNAP supports those whose wages are too low to lift them out of poverty, helping put food on their table. The federal program allows individuals who qualify to purchase food. SNAP funds also can be used to buy seeds and plants that produce food for the household.

Since issues of poverty often show in the school system first, members of the Board of Education, Superintendent Starr, principals, teachers and school staff members are among those who signed up to take the SNAP Challenge.

"The growth of poverty in our district is felt profoundly in our public schools, where about one-third of our students qualify for free and reduced-price meals," said Mr. Barclay. "We must continue to focus on the issue of poverty in Montgomery County so we can make sure all of our children are healthy, well-educated and have a bright future."

In October 2012, approximately 65,200 County residents participated in the SNAP program. From July through October 2012, an average of 2,400 households applied for SNAP benefits each month. For families that qualify for the SNAP program, the average daily benefit per person, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Program (USDA/FNS) statistics, is \$4.28.

"Poverty and hunger have a dramatic impact on the ability of our students to learn and grow and thrive," said School Superintendent Starr. "This week will allow us to raise awareness that a growing number of people—many of them children—are living in poverty right here in one of the nation's wealthiest counties."

Councilmember Ervin invited elected officials; community leaders; civic, student and religious groups; corporate organizations; and individuals to join the challenge and make a statement about helping those who live in poverty in the County.

"We must do more to help those in our community who do not have enough to eat every day," said Councilmember Ervin. "For me, the goal of the SNAP Challenge is to gain a greater appreciation for the struggles that many of our residents and families experience everyday as they make difficult choices to balance their budgets. I hope this challenge will help unite a coalition of advocates to encourage actions that will help those who have no alternative but to eat on \$5 per day."

It's not too late to join the SNAP the Silence Challenge. Those seeking more information or interested in signing up can go to: <http://tinyurl.com/snapthesilence>. The web site also shows others who have signed up to participate. There is also a SNAP Facebook page [www.Facebook.com/snapthesilence](http://www.Facebook.com/snapthesilence) and Twitter handle is [@SNAPtheSilence@ValerieErvin](https://twitter.com/SNAPtheSilence).

The SNAP Challenge rules include:

- No more than \$5 per day per person on food and beverages during the week.
- All food purchased and eaten, including dining out, must be included in the total spending.
- During the Challenge, participants can only eat food purchased for the week. They cannot eat food previously purchased.
- Avoid accepting free food from friends, family or coworkers.
- Keep track of receipts for food purchases throughout the week.

Participants can purchase any food such as breads, cereals, fruits, vegetables, meats, fish, poultry and dairy products. More information about food that can be purchased via SNAP is available at: [http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/contact\\_info/widget.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/contact_info/widget.htm)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture web site offers recipe tips on how to stretch a meager food budget. The site can be found at: <http://recipefinder.nal.usda.gov/>

Other resources on how to extend a food budget can be found by copying the following addresses and pasting them into an URL browser:

- [http://www.harvesters.org/\\_FileLibrary/FileImage/FoodStampChallengeRecipes.pdf](http://www.harvesters.org/_FileLibrary/FileImage/FoodStampChallengeRecipes.pdf)
- <http://www.foodstamped.com/learn-up/recipes>
- <http://fightingpovertywithfaith.com/f2/food-stamp-challenge/category/nutritious-recipes/>
- <http://www.delish.com/food/recalls-reviews/one-in-seven-americans-on-food-stamps-stretch-your-dollar-at-the-grocery>